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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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The Syrian Threat to JordanSummary

Syria will attempt to thwart any Jordanian diplomatic moves seen as threatening to Syrian interests and objectives in the Middle East. Apart from diplomatic responses to block a moderate Arab consensus, Syria can use its terrorist and conventional military assets to intimidate the Jordanian Government. Terrorism offers more options and is a far more flexible instrument than military force. Its consequences also are more easily controlled. Some combination of terrorist attacks and military muscle-flexing is likely, however, and the latter could escalate into a major Syrian-Jordanian border crisis. If successful, Syria would have demonstrated to moderate Arabs and the United States the high risks associated with any move toward peace negotiations that does not take Syrian interests into account.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, at the request of Jock Covey of the National Security Council. Information as of 6 March 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcomed and should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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Syrian Terrorist Assets

PLO Dissidents:

President Assad could use a number of Syrian-sponsored PLO dissident groups--Abu Nidal's Black June, the PFLP-GC, and the Fatah rebels--to carry out terrorist attacks on Jordanian targets. The use of several different groups would mask Syria's involvement and could be depicted as an expression of Palestinian dissatisfaction with Jordanian policy. (see Annex A) [redacted]

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Damascus mobilized its Palestinian surrogates in response to the Palestine National Committee meeting in Amman last November. Syria almost certainly was responsible for the assassination of a Jordanian diplomat in Athens last December by Abu Nidal's Black June group. Damascus probably also instigated the killing of PLO Executive Committee member Fahd al-Qawasmah in Amman. [redacted]

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Jordan's internal security apparatus is probably good enough to thwart most terrorist attacks against key officials inside Jordan. They have been less successful detecting bombs in public places. Jordanian diplomats abroad also would be vulnerable. A terror campaign directed against them would be demoralizing, but would not derail Jordanian policies. [redacted]

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Radical Lebanese Shia:

[redacted] Jordan, an Iraqi ally, is a plausible target for pro-Iranian Shia radicals, and suicide attacks might succeed where more conventional Palestinian terror tactics might fail. [redacted]

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Syrian Terrorist Organizations:

Damascus has its own nominally Palestinian organization, Saiqa, which it has used when it needs a totally controlled paramilitary Palestinian organization to realize Syrian goals in the Middle East. Composed largely of Syrians, Saiqa could be used to carry out terrorist operations if Damascus did not want to hide its own involvement. [redacted]

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The numerous Syrian intelligence organizations, including General Khuli's Air Force Intelligence, General Duba's Military Intelligence, and the Defense Companies' intelligence arm have the capability to conduct bombing and assassination attempts against Jordanian targets. [redacted]

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These organizations have been singularly unsuccessful in mounting operations in Jordan, but their agents would enjoy diplomatic immunity and the support of Syrian embassies should Damascus decide to target Jordanian diplomats abroad. [redacted]

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Conventional Military Assets

Syria has used military force to apply pressure on Jordan on two occasions in the past. The most recent instance was in November-December 1980 when Syria mobilized two armored divisions --one quarter of its total armed forces--on the Jordanian border. Syria accomplished the deployment--meant as a show of force rather than a credible threat to wage war--by diverting about 50 percent of its Golan Heights defenses. Jordan countered by deploying at least two and possibly three divisions to its northern border. At the height of the crisis, Syria had about 500 tanks, 400 armored personnel carriers, and 270 artillery pieces facing an approximately equal Jordanian force.

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Since 1980 Syria has expanded and modernized its armed forces. Jordan has not kept pace either in numbers or in sophistication of equipment. The bulk of Syria's additional strength is now deployed in Lebanon opposite the Israelis, but a total Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon could free up to three Syrian divisions for a deployment along Jordan's border.

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A deployment of this magnitude now would not leave Syria exposed elsewhere as it did in 1980. Syria could still maintain three divisions facing the Golan Heights, two armored divisions and an airborne division in reserve around Damascus, and as many as seven commando regiments--10,500 men--keeping the peace in Lebanon.

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A three-division Syrian force--two armored divisions, a mechanized infantry division, and a supporting artillery brigade--would field nearly 1,000 tanks, 1,100 armored personnel carriers, and 415 artillery pieces--the equivalent of the entire Jordanian Army. Supported by Syria's significantly larger Air Force--550 combat capable aircraft against Jordan's 100--this force would pose a major threat to Jordan. Syria would then have four conventional military options that it could exercise.

Demonstration of Force:

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The lowest risk option would be a show of force along the border, an option Damascus exercised with some success in 1980. Combined with a terrorism campaign, a demonstration of force would show Syrian resolve to oppose Jordanian diplomatic initiatives and create a crisis atmosphere that might disrupt them. At the same time it would not commit Syria to open warfare. Damascus, however, would have to be willing to accept the risk that border clashes might occur that could lead to war.

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Border Clashes:

Damascus could step up the pressure on Jordan by initiating low-level border clashes on the pretext that it was preventing terrorist infiltration into Syria. Jordanian support for anti-Assad Muslim Brotherhood terrorists was one of the pretexts for

the 1980 crisis. Border clashes, if carefully controlled, could be prevented from escalating into a major conflict, while offering Damascus the option of launching "retaliatory" airstrikes or ground attacks if greater pressure were deemed necessary. [redacted]

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Limited Offensive/Airstrikes:

Airstrikes or a limited ground attack into northern Jordan would raise the ante considerably. Because Jordanian air defenses are inadequate, Syrian airstrikes into Jordan would force Jordan to implement contingency plans for attacking Syrian airfields. Despite the qualitative superiority of Jordanian pilots, the Jordanian Air Force would take heavy losses in any confrontation with the Syrians, unless the Iraqi air force provided substantial support.

Even a limited Syrian offensive would engage the bulk of the Jordanian Army and signal full-scale hostilities. Syria would face the prospect of embroiling Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Israel. Only Israel, however, could bring the necessary force to bear quickly to stop Syria. [redacted]

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Iraq, if faced with a simultaneous Iranian attack coordinated with the Syrian offensive, would probably be unwilling to commit major forces to support Jordan. Nevertheless, Baghdad would be alarmed by any Syrian attack on Jordan and even under pressure from Iran probably would send an armored or mechanized division and aircraft and air defense forces to aid Amman within a few days. Saudi Arabia's armed forces are too small and too distant to provide significant assistance. [redacted]

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Major Offensive:

As a last resort, Syria could conduct a full-scale offensive aimed at destroying a substantial part of the Jordanian armed forces and seizing northern Jordan. Outnumbered and outgunned, and without significant reserves to call upon, the Jordanian Army might slow the Syrians down, but Amman would ultimately have to sue for peace. The risks to Syria in this option as well as the limited offensive would be substantial, but so would be the rewards--upsetting the status quo and derailing any moves toward peace negotiations.

ANNEX A

Palestinian Terrorist Groups

<u>Group</u>	<u>Leader</u>	<u>Size of Militia</u>
Fatah Rebels	Political: Nimr Muhammad Salih and Sami Abu Kuwayk Qadri Military: Said Muragha (Abu Musa)	2,000-2,200
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)	Ahmad Jibril	800-1,000
Black June	Sabri al-Banna (Abu Nidal)	500
Saiqa	Issam Qadi	500-1,000

ANNEX B

Syrian Forces - Various Scenarios

Ground Forces

	<u>Troops</u>	<u>Tanks</u>	<u>APCs</u>	<u>Artillery</u>
Two Division:				
1st Armored Div.	14,300	330	340	108
9th Armored Div.*	14,300	330	340	108
27th Artillery Bde.	2,300	0	20	90
Total	30,900	660	700	306
Three Division:				
1st/9th* Armored Div.	28,600	660	680	216
10th Mechanized Div.	16,000	290	416	108
27th Artillery Bde	2,300	0	20	90
Total	46,900	950	1,116	414

* When completely equipped and trained--probably by summer 1985--the 11th Armored Division might be deployed instead.

Air Forces

Regardless of the scenario, Syria's 20th Air Force Division would be available to provide air cover, heliborne assault capability and ground attack capability for Syria's ground forces.

	<u>Squadrons</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>
Fighters	8	160
Ground Attack	2-4*	40-80
Attack Helicopters	4	80
Transport Helicopters	4	80

* Syria might draw ground attack assets from its northern, 22nd Air Force Division which holds at least four squadrons of modern, ground attack aircraft.

To counter these forces Jordan has the following assets:

Tanks	616 *
APCs	1,080
Artillery	397
Fighters/Interceptors (of which configured for all weather ground attack)	100 (17)
Attack Helicopters	0 **
Transport Helicopters	31

* Jordan has approximately 300 additional tanks in ready storage which could be used to replace battle losses.

** 24 attack helicopters are on order. The first six are to be delivered in the first quarter of 1985.

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